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ABSTRACT

Employing multiple case study analysis methods, the attitudes and actions of superintendents in three school districts with improving basic skills test performance were compared with those of superintendents of three nonimproving districts to determine if patterns of difference existed. Contextual variations and superintendents' priorities were explored as antecedents to actions and outcomes. Four contextual variables were identified as potentially relevant to superintendent behavior, including superintendent and principal tenure, community climate, grade configuration and dispersion of attendance centers, and district financial condition. Superintendent's actions were classified under the nine control functions identified by Murphy and associates: supervision, selection, socialization, evaluation, rewards and sanctions, goals, resource allocation, monitoring, and behavior control. In improving districts, there was greater principal awareness of superintendents' goals and priorities; greater evidence of shared superintendent-principal control; a higher priority for teacher evaluation and/or supervision; and more attention paid to analyzing test results. Caution is needed in adopting a single set of practices at the district level to improve student outcomes. Comparisons of test and nontest indicators of student outcomes in the six districts illustrated the complexity and ambiguity of classifying districts as improving or nonimproving on the basis of multiple outcome or single indicators. (35 references) (Author/MLH)

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ANTECEDENTS, ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

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THE SUPERINTENDENT AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: ANTECEDENTS, ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

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For the past two decades much educational research has focused on studies classified under the headings of "teacher effectiveness" and "school effectiveness" (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schwertzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Stallings, 1985). This research has examined teacher and principal behaviors and classroom and school characteristics associated with exceptional student performance. Although some have criticized effectiveness research for the narrowness of its dependent variable (standardized test scores), overgeneralization to contexts beyond its focus and lack of theoretical foundation (Cuban, 1984; Hoy & Miskel, 1987; Purkey & Smith, 1983), it has been widely accepted by practicing educators and policymakers as a model for improving schools and teaching. Numerous school systems and many states have implemented programs designed to incorporate effectiveness correlates at the classroom and school level (Cuban, 1984; Purkey & Smith, 1985). There is little mention, however, of the central office and the role of the superintendent in the effectiveness literature. The research has focused on the school or classroom as the unit of analysis, with emphasis on the behavior teachers and principals. Despite recent calls for decentralization of authority, schools remain part of a larger school district organization. It seems likely that the policies and practices of the larger system, particularly the actions of the superintendent, have an effect on what goes on in schools and ultimately on student outcomes. Recent studies and self-reports by practicing superintendents have begun to address this issue by identifying superintendent actions in effective and improving districts (Aplin, 1984; Glickman & Pajak, 1986; DeYoung, 1986; Hallinger & Murphy, 1982; Hill, Wise, & Shapiro, 1989; Hord, Jolly, & Mendez-Morse, 1990; Jacobson, 1986; Murphy, Hallinger, & Peterson, 1985; Murphy, Peterson, & Hallinger, 1986; Murphy, Hallinger, Peterson, & Lotto, 1987: Murphy & Hallinger, 1988, 1990; Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger, 1987; Spillane, 1984; Vickery, 1988; Wallace, 1985).

Literature Review

A review of the developing literature on district level effectiveness and the role of the superintendent in school improvement revealed potential district level effectiveness correlates. The following were most frequently reported in extant literature as characteristic of effective and/or improving districts:

1) Formal district goals with an emphasis on student learning

Although descriptions of the process of goal development vary, the literature consistently reports that effective districts and districts involved in improvement initiatives establish district wide goals endorsed by the board of education and that the content of goals tends to focus on improvement of student achievement and/or curriculum and instruction (Aplin, 1984; Brown & Hunter, 1986; Cuban, 1984; DeYoung, 1986; Hallinger & Murphy, 1982; Hill et al., 1989; Jacobson, 1986; Peterson et al., 1987; Spillane, 1984; Vickery, 1988; Wallace, 1985).

2) Extensive staff development programs with emphasis on principals' supervisory skills and teachers' instructional skills

Eleven of the 12 superintendents included in a study of effective California districts reported they had system wide staff development programs for teachers and personally controlled the content of approximately 40% of the programs. The focus of these programs was on the establishment of particular teaching models and implementation of district curriculum (Peterson et al., 1987). Other reports also speak of an emphasis on staff development, although with somewhat greater subordinate control over content (Vickery, 1988; Wallace, 1985).

3) Formal and systematic staff evaluation systems with criteria tied to the accomplishment of district goals

The literature reports superintendents in effective districts and districts engaged in school improvement frequently revise evaluation instruments to align criteria with district goals and instructional models (Cuban, 1984; Murphy et al., 1987; Wallace, 1985). In addition, Murphy et al. and Wallace describe highly systematized evaluation procedures with an emphasis on accountability for results (primarily student performance on standardized tests) as a component of both teacher and principal evaluation.

4) Replacement of ineffective principals and teachers

Cuban (1984) points out that superintendents' emphasis on test scores, holding principals accountable for district goals, and the revision of evaluation instruments to reflect these changes can " raise the spectre that principals' jobs are on the line if they don't produce" (p.149). This contention is supported by the literature which reports that superintendents of effective districts and those engaged in improvement initiatives take action to terminate ineffective principals and teachers (Jacobson, 1986; McCrudy, 1983; Murphy et al., 1987).

5) Standardized district curriculum and superintendents' personal involvement in curriculum and instruction.

The literature portrays the "effective district" superintendent as highly involved in curriculum and instruction with central control over curriculum (Aplin, 1984; DeYoung, 1986; Hallinger & Murphy, 1982; Murphy et al., 1986, 1987; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986, 1988; Peterson et al., 1987; Spillane, 1984; Vickery, 1988; Wallace, 1985). This centralized control of curriculum frequently involves the alignment of curriculum objectives with standardized test content (Hallinger & Murphy, 1982; Spillane, 1984; Vickery, 1988; Wallace, 1985). Some reports describe adoption of centralized instructional models as well (Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Wallace, 1985), while others indicate specific instructional models were not dictated (Spillane, 1984; Vickery, 1988).

6) Formal systems for monitoring progress on district goals and student outcomes

Cuban (1984) states one of the things that may be characteristic of superintendents in improving districts is the active monitoring and assessing of the instructional program. Recent studies tend to support Cuban's assertion. The study of the 12 effective California districts found superintendents of these districts actively monitored technical core activities through school visits, meetings with principals, collection of school work products and inspection of standardized test results (Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Murphy et al.,1985). Other authors writing about superintendent actions associated with school improvement also describe

elaborate systems for monitoring student performance outcomes and progress toward goal accomplishment (Aplin & Daresh, 1984; Hill et al., 1989; Wallace, 1985).

7) Superintendent acquisition of funds for educational improvement and centralized budget control.

Literature describing superintendents' actions in improving and effective districts reports three general categories of behavior associated with resource acquisition and allocation: (a) the acquisition of funds from business (Hill et al., 1989; Spillane, 1984), (b) the superintendent's ability to obtain support for tax increases for educational improvements (DeYoung, 1986; Jacobson, 1986), and (c) centralized, as opposed to building level budget control (Hord et al., 1990; Murphy et al., 1987).

Although these seven elements emerge as possible behaviors and district characteristics related to improvement and effectiveness, only one of the cited studies (Jacobson, 1986, 1988) compared superintendents' behaviors in an effective and ineffective school district. The relative absence of studies which compare improving and nonimproving districts makes it impossible to determine whether these district characteristics and superintendent behaviors are unique to improving and effective districts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to add to the existing knowledge base concerning the role of the superintendent in school improvement and effectiveness. The study investigated the actions and attitudes of superintendents in districts which, over a five-year period, had experienced improved basic skills test performance, comparing their actions and attitudes with those of superintendents in districts which had not shown improvement. The purpose of this comparison was to search for differences in the behavior patterns of superintendents of improving and nonimproving districts.

As a secondary focus, the investigation examined principals' perceptions of superintendents' attitudes and actions and the effects of these actions on principals' behavior. This aspect of the study provided a means of verifying superintendents' reports of their actions, as well as indications of principals' perceptions of the effects of district level actions. In addition, district contextual features were examined as possible antecedents to superintendent action. Finally, other student outcomes were collected as a means of exploring the relationship among multiple indicators of effectiveness and possible linkages between superintendents' attitudes and actions and student outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study follows Bridges' (1982) recommendation that studies of educational administration should include simultaneous examination of the three components of Halpin's (1966) model for research on administrative behavior: (a) antecedents, (b) behavior, and (c) outcomes attributable to behavior. District contextual features and superintendents' attitudes were examined as potential antecedents to superintendent behavior.

Murphy et al., (1987) provide a framework of nine control functions for examining superintendents' instructional leadership behaviors and control of principals' actions. These functions include supervision, selection, socialization, goals, evaluation, rewards and sanctions, resource allocation, behavior control/monitoring, and technical core (curriculum and instruction) actions. With minor modifications based on recent studies (Hill et al., 1989; Hord et al.,1990; Jacobson, 1986), Murphy et al.'s. nine control functions were employed as bases

for organizing data related to superintendent behavior and comparing the actions of superintendents in the current study with extant literature.

Under the outcome component of the model, district performance improvement on a state required criterion-referenced reading and mathematics test was employed as the means of classifying a district as improving or nonimproving; however, other student outcome indicators including attendance rates, dropout rates, and postsecondary attendance patterns were also examined to explore the relationship among multiple indicators of effectiveness and to search for possible connections among superintendents' attitudes, actions and outcomes.

Study Methods

A multiple case study design was employed. Following a practice utilized by Murphy et al. (1987) and Glickman and Pajak (1986), a point system was developed to specify the degree of district performance improvement on the Kansas Minimum Competency Test, a criterion-referenced test of reading and mathematics. All Kansas school districts administered this test each year from 1985 through 1989 in grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10. The point system took into account a district's performance on each of the 10 state tests (reading and mathematics at grades 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10) in relation to its own past performance and in relation to that of the state as a whole.

Only those districts having the same superintendent over the five year period of interest and whose performance had been relatively low in relation to that of the state in 1985 were considered for selection. Three districts experiencing the greatest improvement were matched on the basis of size, racial/ethnic composition, and SES with three districts whose test performance had declined between 1985 and 1989. The six selected districts were relatively small, rural districts in which the superintendent was the only district level administrator. They had student enrollments ranging from approximately 700 to 1900 and had two to five attendance centers. All six superintendents were male.

Data were collected in the spring of 1990. On-site interviews, informal observation, and document examination formed the basis for qualitative aspects of the study. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with superintendents and two principals (one elementary, one secondary). Each interview was approximately 2 to 2 1/2 hours long. Other key personnel were interviewed informally relative to issues which emerged in the process of conducting formal interviews with superintendents and principals. Interview data were coded for analysis using the study's conceptual framework as an initial schema. An independent judge also coded the data with an intercoder agreement rate exceeding 85%. Test data, other outcome indicator data, and district financial information obtained from the State Department of Education formed the basis for descriptive, quantitative analysis of student outcomes and contextual variations associated with district wealth.

Study Findings

This section reports the findings associated with each of the components of the conceptual framework: (a) contextual and attitudinal antecedents, (b) superintendent behaviors and district level actions and (c) student outcomes.

Contextual Antecedents

Three categories of district contextual variation were identified as potentially relevant precursors to superintendents' behavior: (a) district contextual problem index, (b) grade

configuration and location of attendance centers within the district, and (c) superintendent and principal tenure.

Contextual Problem Index

The degree to which a district is experiencing problems was identified as a potentially relevant antecedent affecting superintendents' actions. Problems such as failed bond referendums, labor disputes, and lack of community support for schools were contextual elements classified under the construct *contextual problem index*. Particularly in districts in which the superintendent is the only central office administrator, a high *problem index* likely has an effect on the superintendent's ability to devote attention to the technical core and administrative actions associated with instructional leadership.

A superintendent of one of the improving districts, for example, spoke of great animosity between teachers and the board of education when he assumed his post as chief administrator. When asked to identify his personal goals for his district, a possible effect of this contextual situation on the superintendent's actions was revealed:

> I think the first focus was that we get along with folks. We can't have teachers writing letters in the paper about the board, and we can't have the board taking out a paid ad in the paper to state similar things about the teachers. . . . So that and survival were the top two things on the list. Following that I think we moved into staff development. . . . Then we basically did student learning and instruction.

This and similar comments by other superintendents indicate the perceived need to deal with certain contextual problems prior to addressing technical core improvement initiatives.

Problems associated with inadequate facilities were particularly common. All six districts had initiated bond referendums for facility improvements within the past five years. Although no clear pattern of difference emerged between improving and nonimproving districts, superintendents frequently spoke of conflict surrounding bond referendum elections and reported devoting considerable time to efforts directed at bond elections and facility improvement.

Grade Configuration and Attendance Center Location

In small districts there are frequently too few students to warrant a separate building for middle school or junior high age students. These students are placed in the elementary schools under the supervision of elementary principals or in the high school under the supervision of the high school principal. Moreover, although student enrollments are relatively low, rural districts are often composed of several smaller independent communities each of which has its own school. This results in a dispersion of attendance centers. These two factors were identified as potentially relevant contextual variations.

There was some evidence that principals were more satisfied with the placement of grade 7 and 8 students in the high school setting than in the elementary setting. In two of the districts (both improving), seventh and eighth graders were housed in the high school under the supervision of that principal, while in two other districts (one improving, one nonimproving) these students were in the elementary school(s) under the supervision of elementary principals. Elementary principals in this situation complained of a lack of time to devote to instructional leadership. The comments of one K-8 principal speaking about the need for a system to monitor teacher implementation of the curriculum were typical of the frustration these principals expressed:

> That is one of the goals I have and would like to work on, but that comes into the "busyness" of a K-8 building. One thing I find in the K-8 structure is such a wide variety of needs of the students, staff and so forth that even though the school is small, you are spreading yourself over just a wide variety of tasks. If our district was structured differently it would be easier to focus in on curriculum and teacher supervision because you'd be supervising maybe more teachers, but a narrower band of curriculum and that would be easier.

Principals of 7-12 buildings did not register such complaints. In both 7-12 schools there was an assistant building administrator. There were no assistant building administrators in K-8 buildings.

This contextual variation is not viewed as a relevant antecedent to superintendent behavior. However, since all superintendents expressed the desire that principals focus their attention on technical core issues, it does appear to have a potential effect on the ability of the building principal to respond to superintendents' preferences.

Location of attendance centers may have a more direct effect on superintendent behavior. In four of the districts the superintendent's office was located on the same site as one or more of the schools. In such a context supervision and monitoring may take on a different meaning than in the district in which the superintendent must make a conscious, planned effort to visit schools for supervisory purposes. It also may be that where there is frequent informal supervision, the superintendent feels less need for planned visits designed to formally monitor and supervise technical core processes. In such districts administrators reported that the superintendent was in the school every day and monitored in informal ways. One superintendent commented: "About every morning I'll slip by and say good morning and hello. That gives me an opportunity to observe." The principal of one of the schools which was adjacent to the superintendent's office described the superintendent's visits in a similar manner. "He's very good about coming down and visiting. He'll walk through the building and go in the lounge and have a cup of coffee and sit around and visit." Administrators of these small districts frequently indicated that monitoring principals' work and what goes on in the schools was simply not an issue.

Superintendent and Principal Tenure

Five of the six superintendents in the study had 10 or more years' tenure in their current districts, while one superintendent of an improving district had only five years' experience as a superintendent, all in his current district. Four were nearing retirement. There was some evidence that superintendents earlier in their tenures in a district were more actively engaged in curriculum and instruction and in directing technical core activities.

Describing a change in the principal evaluation process in one of the improving districts, one principal said: "Of course it has become more difficult. We've been around a long time, and I think for several years he always worked to write on areas we might improve. . . . He's shied away from that in the last three years." Another principal speaking about the process of building goal development which had at one time been required stated: "I'd say he did it probably two or three . . . years. Of late, the last three years or so, he has sort of dropped that." The superintendent confirmed this change in his behavior and provided a rationale: "We know now what we are trying to do in each of our schools. It was a good task in the beginning for them [principals] to try to figure out what they wanted to do and how they were going to do it." Another superintendent commented that he had personally chaired the district's curriculum development committee "the first year or two so some learning could take place."

Such comments were typical of administrators in four of the five districts in which the superintendent had relatively long tenure. Interestingly, although obviously perhaps only coincidental, the superintendent with only five years' tenure was the most directly involved in technical core activities. This superintendent's actions most closely matched those described in extant literature.

The relationship between principal and superintendent tenure also emerged as a potentially relevant antecedent to superintendent behavior. Peterson (1987) describes selection-socialization as "the primary control that shapes the goal structure of principals" (p. 146). Superintendents may either select principals who share their priorities and goals or they may socialize them to shared priorities and goals. The superintendent who has personally selected all the district's principals is obviously operating in a very different context than the superintendent who has not had the opportunity to select any principals and is in the process of trying to replace or reform those he or she has inherited.

In relation to administrator tenure, two general categories of principals may exist in a district--those the superintendent has hired (selected principals) and those who preceded the superintendent (inherited principals). Within each category, principals may possess the skills and values preferred by the superintendent, or they may have ideas which conflict with those of the superintendent. Four possible variations related to superintendent-principal tenure and the degree to which principals possess the skills and values desired by the superintendent are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Matrix of superintendent-principal tenure and skill/value match

Principal Skill/Value Match	Principal Selection Status: Selected	Principal Selection Status: Inherited
Match Superintendent Preference	I	II
Conflict with Superintendent Preference	III	IV

The dichotomous classification of skills and values as either matching or in conflict with those desired by the superintendent is a likely simplification. Rather than being dichotomous, this variable is more likely continuous; however, the model serves to illustrate a potentially relevant variable associated with superintendent action. Early in her or his tenure a superintendent will obviously have mostly inherited principals. The superintendent with longer tenure has had greater opportunity to select and/or socialize principals. It is reasonable to expect that superintendents of districts in which most principals fall in cell I might feel less need to be personally involved in technical core matters than superintendents of districts having mostly cell IV principals. The superintendent of a district with cell IV principals is logically directing his or her energies toward reforming or replacing these principals.

Attitudinal Antecedents

This study focused considerable attention on exploring superintendents' attitudes, goals and priorities. It was assumed that what a superintendent deems to be important would be reflected in his or her actions and potentially in student outcomes. Superintendent attitudes were believed to be an important consideration relative to the emerging image of the superintendent as highly involved in technical core initiatives and also relative to the classification of districts as effective or ineffective on the basis of test performance. It was believed likely that the degree of superintendent involvement in curriculum and instruction would be related to his or her attitudes regarding the appropriateness of such involvement, and improvement in standardized test performance was seen as potentially related to the degree to which a superintendent viewed test performance as a valid indicator of student learning and an important student outcome. Each superintendent was asked to identify his top three personal priorities or goals for his district over the past five years as a means of exploring this issue.

Technical Core Role

There was considerable evidence to suggest superintendents did not see direct involvement in the technical core as their role. In two improving districts and two nonimproving districts superintendents expressed a philosophy of principal and teacher autonomy in relation to curriculum and instructional issues. Furthermore, all four of these superintendents expressed a perception of personal inadequacy in the areas of curriculum and instruction, indicating they did not have sufficient time or expertise to serve in an instructional leadership capacity. More frequently superintendents in both improving and nonimproving districts expressed the opinion that their role was to provide for a quality staff and/or financial support for program improvement. When asked specifically to identify their personal goals and priorities for their districts, five of the six superintendents mentioned the goal of having a high quality staff.

Process Versus Outcomes

Other frequently identified goals were classified as technical core process goals--providing quality programs and general improvement of curriculum and instruction. Such priorities were described by five superintendents, but the emphasis was clearly on process rather than outcomes. Superintendents talked at length and with pride concerning what they perceived to be improvements in curriculum and programs; however, there was little indication of interest in empirical assessment of the effects of these improvements on student outcomes. This was true in districts with improving test performance as well as those with nonimproving performance.

Principal Perceptions

Each interviewed principal was asked to identify what he or she believed to be the superintendent's top three goals or priorities for the district in the past five years. One pattern of difference between improving and nonimproving districts emerged in this regard. In improving districts there was a greater congruence between superintendents' statements and principals' perceptions. Table 1 reports the number of correct matches for each formally interviewed principal.

Table 1

Number of Correct Identifications of Superintendents' Stated Goals by Principals

	Number of Correct Matches		
District	Principal 1	Principal 2	Total
* A	2	1	3
* B	2	1	3
* C	2	2	4
D	0	0	0
E	1	1	2
F	2	0	2

* Improving Districts

In the three improving districts (A, B, and C) both formally interviewed principals correctly identified one or more of the superintendents' goals. In District E, both principals correctly identified only one goal, while in the three improving districts at least one principal identified two goals correctly. In District F one principal correctly identified two goals while the second principal identified none. Neither of the District D principal respondents correctly identified any of the superintendent's goals.

Superintendent Behavior and District Actions

The current study generally did not find the district level policies and superintendent actions identified in the literature as characteristic of improving and effective districts to be more prevelant in the improving districts than the nonimproving districts. However, some patterns of difference did emerge. Clear patterns of difference between actions in improving and nonimproving districts were found in relation to teacher selection, staff evaluation, monitoring of test results, and organizational control.

Teacher selection

In improving districts the hiring process was a joint activity between principals and the superintendent with relatively equal control and involvement by both. In one of the nonimproving districts (District E) the process was also shared, but with greater superintendent control. Principals in the other two nonimproving districts apparently had primary control over the teacher hiring process (D and F). Table 2 illustrates these differences.

Table 2

Actions Associated with Teacher Selection Process

	Improving Districts			Nonimproving Districts		
Actions	A	B	C	D	E	F
Both supt. & principal screen, interview, & select	X	X	X			
Supt. screens and controls final selection, joint principal supt. interviewing					X	
Principal control of hiring process				X		X

In relation to the selection function, the findings of the current study are generally supportive of the findings of Murphy and Hallinger (1986). They report the superintendents in their study of effective California districts "maintained a balance of 'dynamic tension' between district control and local autonomy in the selection of new staff" (p. 222). In the current study this seemed more true of superintendents of improving districts than nonimproving districts.

Staff Evaluation

Under this control function, teacher and principal evaluation practices were examined. The study provided evidence of more frequent observation and evaluation of teachers in improving districts, and both superintendents and principals in these three districts indicated a greater emphasis on evaluation of teachers than was present in the nonimproving districts. There was no pattern of difference related to principal evaluation. Principals in all districts except D reported they were evaluated annually by the superintendent. Table 3 illustrates findings related to teacher and principal evaluation.

Table 3

Actions Associated with Teacher and Principal Evaluation

	Improving Districts			Nonimproving Districts		
Actions	A	B	C	D	E	F
District requires more frequent teacher observation and evaluation than required by law	X	X	X			
Principal (one per dist.) identifies teacher evaluation as time-consuming task	X	X	X			X
Supt. identifies teacher evaluation as a priority for principals	X	X	X			
Principals & supt. report principals evaluated by supt. annually	X	X	X		X	X

There was no indication in the current study that districts, improving or nonimproving, had revised evaluation instruments to align criteria with district goals, and instructional models as the literature suggests is prevalent in effective and improving districts (Cuban, 1984; Murphy et al., 1987; Wallace, 1985) or that accountability for results, as identified by Murphy et al. and Wallace, was a component of teacher or principal evaluation.

Monitoring Test Results

In relation to the monitoring of test results there were some observable differences between improving and nonimproving districts; however, no district, improving or nonimproving, described the kind of systematic monitoring of test results described in the literature (Aplin & Daresh, 1984; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Hill et al., 1989; Murphy et al., 1985; Wallace, 1985). Table 4 illustrates actions associated with monitoring test results.

Table 4

Actions Associated with Monitoring Standardized Test Performance

	Improving Districts			Nonimproving Districts		
Actions	A	B	C	D	E	F
Principal and/or counselor analyze and report test results to board	X	X			X	
Superintendent analyzes and reports test results to board			X			X
Elementary principal analyzes/examines results across years by classroom	X	X	X			
Elementary principal talks to teachers about test results	X	X	X			
Administrator concern over test results			X		X	
District goal related to test performance			X			
Single individual responsible for curr. dev. and test results	X	X	X			

In Districts A, B and C, the districts with improving State test results, elementary principals provided evidence that they monitored results across years and by classroom; however, it is not clear to what extent this action was at the initiative of the superintendents. Moreover, in improving districts the same individual was responsible for both curriculum development and analysis of test results. This was not the case in nonimproving districts. It may be that the dual responsibility for curriculum development and test analysis results in some attention to curriculum-test alignment.

Organizational Control

The literature reports some evidence of tighter coupling between central office and schools in effective districts and districts engaged in improvement initiatives (Murphy et al., 1986; Spillane, 1984; Wallace, 1985). In the current study only District C exhibited indications of tighter coupling between the schools and central office of the type described in the literature. In other districts the connections between central office and the school appeared to be relatively loose.

Indications of top-down and bottom-up control were also examined. In this regard an interesting difference between improving and nonimproving districts was observed. There was greater evidence of shared superintendent-principal control in the improving districts. Two nonimproving districts exhibited a greater tendency toward bottom-up control while one was more top-down. Table 5 illustrates the presence of top-down, bottom-up, or combined control in relation to various administrative functions.

Table 5

Evidence of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Control in Administrative Areas Related to Technical Core

	Improving Districts			Nonimproving Districts		
Administrative Areas	A	B	C	D	E	F
Curriculum	T/B	B	T	B	T/B	T/B
Instructional Specification	B	B	T/B	B	B	B
Staff Development						
Teachers	T/B	T/B	T/B	B	T/B	B
Principals	T/B	T/B	T	B	T	B
Teacher Selection	T/B	T/B	T/B	B	T	B
Student Rewards/Sanctions	B	B	T/B	B	B	B
Budget Allocation	T	T/B	T	B	T	T/B
Total Top-Down	1	0	3	0	3	0
Total Top-Down/ Bottom-up	4	4	4	0	2	2
Total Bottom-up	2	3	0	7	2	5

T = Top-down, superintendent actions dominate

B = Bottom-up, principal autonomous actions dominate

T/B = Combined top-down and bottom-up actions

The table reveals there is more evidence of combined top-down/bottom up control in the improving districts. The type of top-down/bottom-up control evident in the improving districts in the current study, however, was not the variety typically described in the literature. For example, Cuban (1984) describes the combination top-down/bottom-up strategy as involving mandates from central office for the establishment of goals and procedures for assessing outcomes, but school control over processes. Similarly, Glickman and Pajak (1986) describe the top-down/bottom-up district in their study as having centrally established goals, but school latitude in establishing objectives and processes for meeting the goals. The type of top-down/bottom up control found to be prevelant in the improving districts in the current study might be more accurately described as balanced or shared. In the improving districts, principals were not as totally autonomous as they apparently were in Districts D and F; yet, there was little evidence of top-down control, particularly in Districts A and B. Superintendents had taken actions to socialize principals to their priorities, but there was little indication they forced the issue if principals failed to comply with their priorities for them. As previously reported, there was also greater principal awareness of superintendents' priorities and goals in these districts which may be related to the greater tendency for shared decision-making. In many respects the actions of Superintendent E are similar to the actions of superintendents of improving districts in this regard, but greater top-down control was evident in District E.

Student Outcomes

The use of test performance as the sole criterion of effectiveness or improvement has frequently been criticized in relation to the effective schools research (Bossert, 1988; Cuban, 1984; Fechtling, 1989; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rowan, 1985; Rowan, Bossert, & Dwyer, 1983). In the current study, like most studies of school effectiveness, test performance was used as the criterion for classifying a district as improving or nonimproving. Districts A, B and C were classified as improving districts on the basis of their State Minimum Competency Test pass rates in 1985 and 1989, while Districts D, E and F were classified as nonimproving. On this outcome there was a clear distinction between improving and nonimproving districts. However, when other student outcome indicators were examined the distinction became less clear.

Other Outcome Data

Table 6 presents other student outcome indicator data which were consistently available for all six districts from the State Department of Education. Indicators include district attendance rate, dropout rate, percent of students attending college, and percent attending all postsecondary institutions which includes vocational training as well as two and four-year college attendance.

Table 6

State and District Student Outcome Indicator Data for 1985 and 1989

District	* Attendance Rate			* Dropout Rate			* College Attendance			* Postsecondary Attendance		
	1985	1989	Gain/ Loss	1985	1989	Gain/ Loss	1985	1989	Gain/ Loss	1985	1989	Gain/ Loss
* * A	96.3	95.6	- .7	1.3	1.8	.5	33.3	58.0	24.7	36.8	61.3	24.5
* * B	94.4	95.5	1.1	3.1	3.0	- .1	32.2	54.2	22.0	35.7	54.2	18.5
* * C	95.8	94.9	- .9	1.4	1.0	- .4	60.7	68.3	7.6	74.5	70.7	-3.8
D	94.9	95.1	.2	3.1	3.4	.3	60.0	70.8	10.8	63.2	76.2	13.0
E	95.8	96.9	1.1	2.4	2.0	- .4	55.5	55.2	- .3	65.1	62.1	-3.0
F	95.7	95.3	-.4	3.2	3.6	.4	42.9	52.1	9.2	54.5	54.5	-0-
State Average	NA	94.5	NA	4.0	4.5	.5	57.0	64.0	7.0	65.3	70.1	4.8

* All data expressed in percentages
* * Improving districts
NA Not available

Average daily attendance rates for the six districts are similar and in all cases slightly higher than the 1989 State average. The same is true of dropout rate. Although there is a 2.6% difference in the 1989 dropout rate of District C and District F, considering they have high school enrollments of approximately 200 and 350 respectively, these differences, practically speaking, are insignificant. Dropout rates for all six districts are lower than the state's average.

Differences among districts are more pronounced in relation to college attendance and overall postsecondary attendance. All districts except District E show increases in college attendance, with those of Districts A and B being the greatest; however, college attendance in these "improving districts" remains below that of the state as a whole. Only the college attendance rates of Districts C and D are above those of the state. No contextual variations could be identified which might account for these differences in postsecondary attendance rates. In addition, no pattern of district level action or superintendent behavior was identified which might be linked to these student outcomes.

Conflicts Between Testing and Non-Test Outcomes

The greatest conflict in relation to identifying a district as improving or nonimproving on the basis of its State Minimum Competency Test (MCT) performance and non-test indicator data is in District D which clearly demonstrates improvement and relatively high performance on the outcome of college and postsecondary attendance, but nonimproving test results. A second conflict is apparent in Districts A and B which have improving MCT performance, but relatively low percentages of students pursuing college and other postsecondary educational experiences, although both districts do show improvement in this indicator of student outcomes. These comparisons illustrate the complexity of classifying a district as improving or nonimproving on the basis of multiple indicators. The data also clearly illustrate, however, the inaccuracies of summarily classifying these districts as improving or nonimproving, effective or ineffective, on the basis of a single indicator.

Summary

By comparing the actions of superintendents of districts with improving and nonimproving test performance, the current study provided the opportunity to search for patterns of difference or similarity which might support or refute the emerging image of the instructionally effective school district portrayed in the literature. The final section of this report returns to the seven factors identified in extant literature as characteristic of improving and effective districts and reports findings of the current study in relation to each of these factors.

1) Formal district goals with an emphasis on student learning

In the current study two improving districts and one nonimproving district had formally established district goals. In only one district was there evidence of an emphasis on student learning in the goal content.

2) Extensive staff development programs with emphasis on principals' supervisory skills and teachers' instructional skills.

All improving districts and one nonimproving district had systems of staff development similar to those described in the literature. There was no apparent difference in the quality of staff development or the type of programs offered in the improving districts and the one nonimproving district. All four programs were clearly superior to those in two of the nonimproving districts.

3) Formal and systematic staff evaluation systems with criteria tied to the accomplishment of district goals.

There was no indication that any district had tied staff evaluation systems to district goals. Even in the district in which the monitoring of district goals appeared to be fairly well refined, principals indicated they were not evaluated on the basis of goal accomplishment. As reported previously, there was evidence of greater attention to teacher evaluation and supervision in the improving districts.

4) Replacement of ineffective principals and teachers

All superintendents spoke of dismissing ineffective teachers. There was no evidence to suggest this action was more common in improving districts.

5) Standardized district curriculum and superintendents' personal involvement in curriculum and instruction.

All districts had a standardized, written district curriculum; however, principals in both improving and nonimproving districts expressed skepticism concerning teacher use of the curriculum guides. Only one superintendent (Superintendent C) appeared to be highly involved in curriculum and instruction. The superintendent who might be classified as "coming in second" in this regard was the superintendent of a nonimproving district.

6) Formal systems for monitoring progress on district goals and student outcomes

As reported previously, there was some evidence of greater attention to test results in improving districts, but there was little other evidence of monitoring of student outcomes in either improving or nonimproving districts. Although three districts (two improving, one nonimproving) had formally established district goals, only one district appeared to have a formalized system in place for monitoring goal accomplishment.

7) Superintendent acquisition of funds for educational improvement and centralized budget control.

In five of the six districts (three improving, two nonimproving) superintendents were clearly in control of the budget. One nonimproving district had a building-based budgeting system. In each of the centrally controlled districts principals spoke of the superintendent's skill in acquiring and managing funds for technical core improvements. No pattern of difference was apparent in improving and nonimproving districts in relation to the acquisition of funds or the superintendent's direct control of the budget.

Final Comments

In the current climate of accountability for results, educators and policymakers are anxious for prescriptions for action. Classroom, teacher, school and principal effectiveness correlates have been widely accepted as the model for school improvement. There is now a great desire to delineate the role of the district and superintendent. Careful examination of classroom and school effectiveness research, however, reveals far greater complexity than the lists of effectiveness correlates imply. As research on district level effectiveness progresses it is important to retain an appreciation for the effects and influences of the complexity at the district level. The current study and comparisons of the findings of this study with extant literature suggest the need for caution in adopting any single set of correlates at the district level as a prescription for improvement.

Research associated with district level effects should certainly continue to search for patterns of behavior associated with district improvement and effectiveness, but perhaps with the goal of identifying multiple paths rather than a single, five or six component, model. Ultimately, the most useful contribution of research may be the identification of relevant factors to be considered by practitioners in mapping their own paths to improvement based on the unique contextual characteristics of their districts and the outcomes deemed most important for their students.

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